



## **WEEKLY STUDY March 26 – April 1, 2023**

(Use this guide to individually or with a group dive deeper into this week's sermon.)

### **Our sermon series for Lent is: "Made For a Miracle"**

On Ash Wednesday we began our new sermon series: Made for a miracle. As we journey to the cross with Jesus this Lent, we will be examining the miracles in the book of John. Each one offers us an invitation to conversion: from emptiness to overflow; from holding on to letting go; from fear to courage; from spiritual blindness to depth of sight; from death to life. We are encouraged to make the season of Lent a meaningful one through practices that enrich our spiritual life and increase our missional outreach to family, church, and community.

### **Our scripture this week is John 11: 38-44 (CEB)**

"Jesus was deeply disturbed again when he came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone covered the entrance. Jesus said, 'Remove the stone.'

Martha, the sister of the dead man, said, 'Lord, the smell will be awful! He's been dead four days.'

Jesus replied, 'Didn't I tell you that if you believe, you will see God's glory?' So they removed the stone. Jesus looked up and said, 'Father, thank you for hearing me. I know you always hear me. I say this for the benefit of the crowd standing here so that they will believe that you sent me.' Having said this, Jesus shouted with a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come out!' The dead man came out, his feet bound and his hands tied, and his face covered with a cloth. Jesus said to them, 'Untie him and let him go.'"

- 1)** Our scripture this week recounts the miracle (called sign in the Gospel of John) of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. The Gospel of John is the only Gospel that tells of the raising of Lazarus. Pastor Sam reminded us that the miracles or signs in John: 1) Reveal who Jesus is; 2) Point to the character of the Kingdom; and 3) Create faith. Throughout this Gospel, the writer of John's greater purpose is to reveal that Jesus is more than a teacher, more than a healer. Jesus is equal to God in every way. While on Sunday we read only a portion, Pastor Sam preached using the entire account in John 11. If you can, take time to read the whole account of this sign: John 11:1-44.

***Question: In what ways do you see the power of Jesus emphasized in the miracle of Lazarus raised from the dead? What speaks to you most about this miracle?***

2) In the sermon on Sunday, Pastor Sam stated that for her, the exchanges Jesus has with Martha are the most significant in understanding the theological import of the story. Reread John 11: 17-27. Through this exchange, Jesus states, He is the Life. New life doesn't just wait for after death, New life can be found here and now. Sam included a quote from commentator Meda Stamper that says, "Abundant life is always ever now."

**Question: Stop and consider the evidence of abundant life around and within you. What reminds you that abundant life is now. What gives you hope?**

3) Pastor Sam brought up a point I had never considered before. When Lazarus came from the grave, he was still wrapped in cloth. (Pastor Steve emphasized this to the children when he said Lazarus looked like a mummy.) Jesus himself didn't unwrap Lazarus – he called upon the people who had gathered there because they loved Lazarus. Jesus said to those who loved Lazarus, "Unwrap him." They had a part in bringing him back to life. Sam reminded us that although Lazarus was standing there alive, it would take months for him to fully understand that he was dead and now he is alive. We have a part in bringing others back to life. Those who love us have a part in bringing us back to life. This line from "Blest Be the Tie that Bind" popped into my head: "We share each other's woes, Our mutual burdens bear." We have God and we have those who love us.

**Question: When have you felt bound by something that took away your life? Who helped you take off your bindings? Who have you helped to shed the bindings of grief, or death, or illness, or despair?**

4) During this season of Lent, we have been blessed by the visuals created by Pastor Gracie Dugan and Amy Sigmon for the worship tables in both services. There is a spiritual practice called "Visio Divina" - the act of divine seeing. In this practice you are encouraged to pick an image; study the image and ask God to reveal God's self through the image. I have included 2 images with this guide. One from Sunday morning with the visual of our worship table and the children gathered near. Another from a more stylized image of Jesus raising Lazarus. Pick one. Rest your eyes on the image and let it fill your senses.

**Question: What feelings arise in you as you view it? If you were in this image, where would you be? What do you see God showing you from your consideration of this image?**

**Prayer:** (Our prayer this week is the Affirmation of Faith from Sunday's service.)

**"O God of graves and glory. Will you call us from death? Call us to wake up, to come out. Call us to be unbound and let go. Help us see the life that is to be lived each day. Help us to embrace the abundant life that is waiting for us. With your strength and love, O Lord, we can leave what is heavy behind and offer our grave clothes to you, for you are the Resurrection and the Life. AMEN"**

**Weekly Challenge:** This Sunday was the fifth Sunday in Lent. (Remember – every Sunday is a feast day because that was the day Jesus was resurrected.) Lent is the time to deepen our faith; to spend time listening for God's guidance; to give witness in our actions and practices to our faith. What are the things that keep you bound like the grave cloths bound Lazarus

when he was called forth from the grave? In your daily time of prayer, pray for God's peace and power to be with you as you let go of what binds you and move into new life.

*(Weekly study guide prepared by Rev. MaryJane Pierce Norton)*

